

**Finding of No Significant Impact  
Little Willow Creek Protective Oil and Gas Leasing  
Environmental Assessment #DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA**

**Introduction**

This unsigned Finding of No Significant Impact and the attached DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA for the Four Rivers Field Office (FRFO) are available for public review and comment for 30 days beginning on December 15, 2014.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA) to analyze the potential effects of offering five lease parcels containing 6,349.20 surveyed acres of federal minerals for competitive oil and gas leasing in a sale tentatively scheduled to occur in April 2015. The EA was prepared based on available information including inventory and monitoring data files.

Impact identification and analysis of three alternatives has been completed. The No Federal Mineral Estate Leasing Alternative would not offer five parcels for oil and gas leasing. The Leasing Federal Mineral Estate with No Surface or Subsurface Occupancy Stipulations Alternative would offer five parcels (6,349.20 total acres) for lease with the ability to drain the federal mineral reserve; however, potential surface and subsurface occupancy of the parcels would not be allowed until completion of the FRFO Resource Management Plan (FRMP). The Leasing Federal Mineral Estate with Cascade RMP Stipulations and Additional Lease Notices Alternative would offer five parcels lease with existing RMP lease stipulations and/or lease notices as necessary for competitive oil and gas lease sale and lease issuance.

The five parcels are located in Payette County, 4-12 miles east of Payette, Idaho. Standard federal lease terms and conditions, as well as the stipulations identified in Appendix C of the EA, would apply. Lease stipulations (as required by Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 3131.3) were added as necessary to each parcel as identified by the BLM to address site specific resource concerns.

It is the policy of the BLM as derived from various laws, including the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended [30 U.S.C. 181 et seq.] and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 [43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.], to make mineral resources available for disposal and to encourage development of mineral resources to meet national, regional, and local needs.

**Plan Conformance and Consistency**

Leasing federal mineral estate is consistent with the 1988 Cascade RMP (EA Section 1.5). The plan made 456,289 acres available for leasing, including the five parcels and provided lease stipulations for a variety of resources.

**Finding of No Significant Impacts**

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined the actions analyzed in DOI-BLM-

ID-B010-2014-0036-EA would not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

With regard to the issue of impacts to global climate change (GCC) and/or levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that may contribute to GCC, as discussed in the EA (Section 3.4), the current state of the science does not allow determinations to be made about the specific effects of specific actions. Therefore, while I find that the proposed action would result in no significant impacts, either individually or cumulatively, as described in more detail below; no similar finding is made with respect to GCC or GHG emissions. However, given the state of the science, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not warranted, as it would not further inform my decision, or the public, with respect to the significance or lack thereof, of this proposed action as to the issue of GCC or GHG.

This finding was made by considering both the context and intensity of the potential effects, as described in the above EA, using the following factors defining significance:

*1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

Potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts for soils, vegetation, air resources, water resources, wildlife, cultural resources, recreation, visual resources, lands and realty, livestock management, fluid minerals, and social and economic resources were disclosed in the EA (Section 3.0). Stipulations, lease notices, and measures designed to mitigate impacts to the various resources and land uses were incorporated in the leasing alternatives. The analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, or the affected resources. The physical and biological effects typically would be limited to the leased Federal lands managed by BLM and adjacent land.

*2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The lease alternatives do not authorize any lease exploration or development activities and include stipulations and lease notices designed to minimize impacts to public health and safety as well as to other resources. The EA analyzed impacts from a reasonably foreseeable development scenario (RFDS) and general impacts to public health and safety were identified (e.g., EA sections 3.4.2, 3.5.2). However, a separate environmental analysis would be conducted for proposed exploration and development projects. That analysis would identify potential impacts to public health and safety as well as measures designed to minimize or eliminate impacts to public health and safety.

*3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The historic and cultural resources of the area of potential effect have been reviewed by BLM. The BLM is in the process of consulting with affected Tribes about the proposed action. The potential impacts have been mitigated with identified stipulations (S-2, EA sections 2.3 and 3.7.2) and mitigating measures. Impacts to wetlands were identified; however, avoidance and other mitigation measures would limit their intensity (EA Section

3.5.2). There are no impacts to park lands, prime farmlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

*4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

No impacts associated with leasing were identified as being controversial. While leasing may be somewhat controversial to some members of the public, leasing conforms to current land use plan guidance which allocated federal mineral estate administered by the BLM as either available or administratively unavailable for oil and gas leasing. As a factor for determining (within the meaning of 40 CFR section 1508.27(b) (4)) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, “controversy is not equated with “the existence of opposition to a use” (Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536, 9th Cir. 1997). The potential development and production impacts to groundwater could be controversial. The EA identified a range of impacts based on potential scenarios (EA Section 3.5.2). Separate analysis at the exploration and development phase would provide more in-depth analysis. No other anticipated effects have been identified that are controversial.

*5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The proposed action of selling oil and gas leases is not unique or unusual. The State and private mineral owners also sell oil and gas leases in Payette County and the BLM has extensive experience selling leases in other states. The EA describes typical exploration and development activities that could occur on a federal lease (RFDS) along with the potential impacts from those activities as well as mitigation measures designed to minimize or eliminate impacts (EA Section 3.0). There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

*6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

This proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions. A federal oil and gas lease does not authorize any exploration or development activities; however, the lease provides the lessee with the opportunity to explore for and develop oil and gas resources after receipt of necessary approvals. A separate environmental analysis would be conducted for exploration and development projects before approval of a project.

*7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The proposed action by itself or in connection with other activities would not have significant impacts (EA sections 3.2.4, 3.3.4, 3.4.4, 3.5.4, 3.6.4, 3.11.4, 3.12.4, 3.13.4). Exploration and development projects would be analyzed to determine the significance of cumulative impacts.

*8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The leasing alternatives would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (EA Section 3.7). Based on existing cultural surveys and through mitigation by avoidance, no adverse cultural resource impacts were identified or anticipated. There are no known features within the area of potential effect listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Site specific surveys would be conducted for activities proposed in the exploration and development phase and potential impacts identified in separate analyses.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Stipulations designed to minimize impacts to special status species or their habitat are included in alternatives B and C. The EA identified potential impacts from exploration and development activities; however, implementation of stipulations, lease notices, and other mitigation measures would limit the impacts to a non-significant level (EA sections 3.3.2 and 3.6.2).

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for protection of the environment.*

The leasing alternatives do not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (EA Section 1.6). State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, leasing would be consistent with the applicable land management plan, policies, and programs (EA Section 1.5).

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Date